

A MULTIPLE MASK STEP AND SCAN ALIGNER

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

(1) Field of the Invention

The invention relates to a method of fabricating semiconductor structures, and more particularly, to an optical lithographic exposure apparatus with a multiple mask capability suitable for double-exposure processes in the manufacture of integrated circuits.

(2) Description of the Prior Art

As optical lithography is used to delineate 0.1 micron and smaller features, the lithographic tools must work in a low k_1 region. The k_1 , or Rayleigh's coefficient, for resolution, is given by the equation:

$$k_1 = \frac{CD \times NA}{\lambda}$$

where CD is the critical dimension of the line feature, NA is the numerical aperture, and λ is the wavelength of the exposure light. For example, if the exposure wavelength

is 193 nanometers and the NA is 0.63, then k_1 is 0.39. At such a low k_1 , extremely aggressive image enhancing techniques have to be used to produce usable images for IC manufacture. One such technique is the use of double exposures with two different masks.

For example, an alternating phase shifting mask (PSM) may be used when the desired feature size of an integrated circuit layer is on the same order of magnitude as the wavelength of light used in the photolithographic process. If a PSM is used, then a second exposure from a binary intensity mask (BIM) must be performed to remove any extra lines caused by the phase shifting interference at the feature boundaries.

In a typical photolithographic mask, layer features, or traces, are formed on the mask in an opaque material such as chrome. This chrome layer is formed overlying a transparent quartz substrate. Light is shown through this mask to expose a photosensitive material, commonly photoresist, as defined by the mask pattern. After the photoresist is developed, the photoresist will reflect a copy or a reverse copy of the mask pattern.

However, in a phase shifting mask, an additional component is added to the chrome and quartz system. Either through the application of an additional transparent layer or the through the removal of a portion of the quartz layer to a specific depth, the optical properties are changed in a part of the transparent (not covered by chrome) sections of the mask. Specifically, when light of the lithographic wavelength is shown through the mask, a phase shift is created between light waves that pass through the phase shifted area and the light waves that pass through the non-phase shifted area. By shifting the phase of the light by 180 degrees, nodes, or cancellations of energy will occur at opaque boundaries between the phase shifted and non-phase shifted areas. This principle is used to create more sharply defined boundary conditions during the photolithographic exposure. Sharper definition leads to improved pattern transfer.

In the case of the PSM method, two distinct reticles, the phase shifting mask (PSM) and binary intensity mask (BIM) are used. Referring now to Fig. 1, an alternating PSM mask 10 is shown for a simple feature. A chrome line 14 is formed on the mask. The chrome 14 is opaque and reflects exposure light away from the semiconductor wafer.

The transparent regions of the mask 10 are divided into a zero degree, or non-phase shifting, region 18 and a 180 degree, or phase shifting, region 22. The phase shifting region 22 is specially treated to cause the transmitted exposure light to be shifted 180 degrees with respect to transmitted exposure light traveling through the non-phase shifting region 18.

Referring now to Fig. 2, the BIM mask 30 is illustrated. The purpose of the BIM mask 30 is to remove any extra lines caused by the interference of the phase shifted light and non-phase shifted light at the boundaries of each region. The BIM mask 30 contains a chrome feature 34 overlying the transparent substrate 38. The feature 34 is an appropriately oversized copy of the critical PSM feature of the PSM mask.

The PSM mask and the BIM mask are used sequentially. First, the semiconductor wafer is coated with a photoresist layer. Second, the PSM mask of Fig. 1 is loaded into the mask stage of the optical lithographic stepper and aligned. The photoresist layer is then exposed, field by field, to actinic light through the PSM mask. Third, the PSM mask is replaced with the BIM mask of Fig. 2. The BIM mask must be

aligned. The undeveloped photoresist layer is exposed, field-by-field, to actinic light through the BIM layer. At the end of the process, every field has been exposed to thereby superimpose the patterns of the PSM mask and the BIM mask in every field.

Referring now to Fig. 3, a top view of the semiconductor substrate is shown. The photoresist layer 54 is developed. The photoresist layer 54 exhibits a very defined pattern overlying the semiconductor substrate 50. The double-exposure method enables the creation of smaller line widths than possible with a single, non-phase shifted exposure.

If a conventional stepper is used for this process, the operator must first install and then align the first mask. After exposing through the first mask, the operator must remove the first mask and install the second mask. This is because the conventional stepper can only hold and align a single mask at a time. The second mask must be aligned prior to the second exposure. It would be very advantageous and cost saving to eliminate a reticle change and alignment from the double-exposure process.

Several prior art approaches concern methods to double-expose an integrated circuit and apparatus for holding masks. U.S. Patent 5,989,761 to Kawakubo et al teaches a method to expose photolithographic masks onto a substrate. First and second masks, corresponding to different substrate layers, are used. The first and second masks are exposed with different apparatus having different exposure field sizes. The first mask is exposed on the first apparatus. A perpendicular error and a mean value of rotation are detected for the first exposure. The second mask is rotated based on the detected error of the first mask to compensate and correct the error. U.S. Patent 5,847,813 to Hirayanagi discloses a mask holding apparatus for lithographic exposure masks. The apparatus adds an inner frame to the conventional outer frame to thereby improve support, thermal transfer, and electrical grounding. U.S. Patent 4,924,258 to Tsutsui teaches a mask holding and conveying mechanism. The mask holding mechanism comprises a reference member, an aperture, a spring-biased first member, and a spring-biased second member.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A principal object of the present invention is to provide an effective optical lithographic exposure apparatus and method of use thereof for patterning a photoresist layer in the manufacture of an integrated circuit device.

A further object of the present invention is to provide an exposure apparatus capable of holding two masks in a fixed relative position for sequential exposure of the mask patterns onto a semiconductor wafer.

A yet further object of the present invention is to provide an exposure apparatus capable of aligning two masks prior to the sequential exposure of the mask patterns onto a semiconductor wafer to thereby save time.

Another yet further object of the present invention is to provide an exposure apparatus capable of independently aligning two masks.

Another further object of the present invention is to provide an effective and very manufacturable method to

pattern a photoresist layer wherein the photoresist layer is sequentially exposed to actinic light through two different masks.

Another yet further object of the present invention is to use a two mask holding apparatus to sequentially expose the photoresist layer through a PSM mask and through a BIM mask to thereby enhance the image of the pattern.

Another yet further object of the present invention is to expose sequentially the photoresist layer through the first mask and the second mask without a mask change and alignment to thereby save time.

In accordance with the objects of this invention, a new optical lithographic exposure apparatus is described. The apparatus may comprise step and scan capability. A wafer stage comprises a means of supporting a semiconductor wafer. A mask stage comprises a means of holding a first mask and a second mask and maintaining a fixed relative position between the first mask and the second mask. The mask stage may further comprise an independent means of aligning each mask. A light source comprises a means to selectively shine actinic light through either the first

mask or the second mask. An imaging lens is capable of focusing the actinic light onto the semiconductor wafer. A means of stepping the mask stage across the semiconductor wafer is provided.

Also in accordance with the objects of the present invention, a new method to pattern a photoresist layer in the manufacture of an integrated circuit device is achieved. A photoresist layer is deposited overlying a semiconductor substrate. A first mask and a second mask are loaded into a mask stage of an optical lithographic exposure apparatus having a step and scan capability. The mask stage maintains a fixed relative position between the first mask and the second mask. The first mask and the second mask are aligned. The wafer is indexed to a starting field that becomes the current field. The first mask is scanned to expose the current field. The wafer is then indexed to a next field unexposed by the first mask. The stepping and scanning is repeated until every field on the semiconductor substrate is exposed with the first mask. The wafer is then indexed to the starting field that becomes the current field. The second mask is scanned to expose the current field. The wafer is then indexed to a next field unexposed by the second mask. The stepping and scanning is

repeated until every field on the semiconductor substrate is exposed with the second mask. The patterns of the first mask and the second mask are thereby superimposed in every field. The photoresist layer is developed to thereby complete the patterning in the manufacture of the integrated circuit device.

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field unexposed by the second mask to become the current field. The second mask is scanned to expose the current field. The wafer is then indexed to the next field unexposed by the first mask to become the current field. The first mask is scanned to expose the current field. The stepping and scanning is repeated until every field on the semiconductor substrate is exposed. The patterns of the first mask and the second mask are thereby superimposed in every field. The photoresist layer is developed to thereby complete the patterning in the manufacture of the integrated circuit device.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the accompanying drawings forming a material part of this description, there is shown:

Fig. 1 illustrates in simplified form an alternating phase shifting mask (PSM).

Fig. 2 illustrates in simplified form a binary intensity mask (BIM).

Fig. 3 illustrates in simplified form a photoresist feature formed by double-exposure using the PSM mask of Fig. 1 and the BIM mask of Fig. 2.

Fig. 4 illustrates in simplified form the key components of the preferred embodiment of the optical stepper apparatus of the present invention.

Figs. 5 and 6 illustrate two configurations of a mask stage for the preferred embodiment apparatus of the present invention.

Fig. 7 illustrates the optional addition of a viewing microscope with alignment marks to the apparatus of the present invention.

Fig. 8 illustrates, in flow chart form, a first preferred embodiment of the method of the present invention.

Figs. 9 and 10 illustrate a semiconductor wafer processed by the first preferred embodiment of the method of the present invention.

Fig. 11 illustrates, in flow chart form, a second preferred embodiment of the method of the present invention.

Figs. 12 through 14 illustrate a semiconductor wafer processed by the second preferred embodiment of the method of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The embodiments disclose an optical lithographic exposure apparatus with a novel mask stage capable of holding and aligning two masks at a time. This apparatus may comprise, for example, an optical stepper or scanner. Further, it is preferred that the exposure apparatus have a step and scan capability. This apparatus is ideally suited for double-exposure processing in the manufacture of an integrated circuit device. In addition, two methods for double exposing using a two-mask step and scan process are described. It should be clear to those experienced in the art that the present invention can be applied and extended without deviating from the scope of the present invention.

Referring now particularly to Fig. 4, a simplified form of the preferred embodiment of the apparatus of the present invention illustrated. The key components of a new optical lithographic exposure apparatus are shown. This apparatus adds the ability to load and align two masks and then expose a semiconductor wafer using each of these reticles without a time consuming mask change and alignment step. The semiconductor wafer 274 is supported on a wafer stage 276.

An important aspect of the present invention is the novel mask stage 250. This mask stage 250 comprises a means of holding a first mask 262 and a second mask 260. Each mask 260 and 262 is held in a separate fixture 256 and 258 in the mask stage 250. Each mask 260 and 262 can be independently aligned to the wafer 274 and to the other mask. Once aligned, the mask stage 250 maintains the fixed relative position between the first mask 262 and the second mask 262.

The ability to independently hold and align the two masks 260 and 262 allows an operator to load both masks at the beginning of the lithographic operation. Both masks 260 and 262 are then aligned. Each mask can then be used

for exposing fields on the semiconductor wafer 272 without a time consuming mask change therebetween.

A light source 254 comprises a means of selectively shining actinic light through either the first mask 262 or the second mask 260. The light source 254 may comprise, for example, a laser-based source with a specific light wavelength. In the preferred embodiment, the light source 254 comprises a wavelength of 193 nanometers. The light source 254 may include an optical circuit capable of flashing the actinic light for a specific length of time.

An imaging lens 270 is capable of focusing the actinic light that passes through either of the masks 260 and 262 onto the semiconductor wafer 274. The imaging lens 270 and the mask stage 250 are linked such that the image of the exposed mask will be focused onto a particular field of the wafer 274 during each exposure step. Further, the imaging lens 270 and the mask stage 250 can be stepped, or indexed, from field to field across the semiconductor wafer.

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The preferred application of the stepper apparatus having a two-mask stage 250 is the double-exposure process described in Figs. 1 through 3. For example, an

alternating PSM mask of the type shown in Fig. 1 may be loaded into the first mask fixture 258. A binary intensity mask (BIM) of the type shown in Fig. 2 may be loaded into the second mask fixture 256. Both masks 260 and 262 are then aligned. The apparatus may then be used to sequentially expose every field on the semiconductor wafer to actinic light through both the PSM mask 262 and the BIM mask 260 such that the patterns of each mask are superimposed on each field. The novel ability to hold two masks, to maintain a fixed relational position between the two masks, and to align both masks prior to exposure provides a significant flexibility and time savings for the operator.

Referring briefly now to Fig. 9, a semiconductor wafer 400 is illustrated. An array of fields 404 is shown. The exposure apparatus of the present invention exposes single fields 404 across the wafer. When fields are completed, the stepper indexes to the next field until the entire wafer is exposed. Each field may comprise several integrated circuit die. The preferred embodiment exposure apparatus comprises a step and scan capability. Step and scan uses an illuminated slot which is scanned over the mask to expose the wafer. While the lens remains

stationary, the mask and wafer move in a controlled fashion. The wafer is stepped to a field and then the mask is scanned. In a 4X system, for example, the mask moves 4 times faster than the wafer.

Returning now to Fig. 4, note that the scanning direction of the apparatus is shown. In this embodiment, the novel mask stage 250 is configured such that the first mask 262 and the second mask 260 are placed side-by-side in the same direction as the scanning direction. Alternatively, the first mask and second mask may be configured across the scanning direction.

Referring now to Fig. 5, one such configuration of the mask stage is shown in greater detail. Several important features of the present invention are shown. In this configuration, the mask stage 100 is configured such that the fixed relative position between the first mask 104 and the second mask 108 is consistent with the scanning direction. Further, the first mask 104 and the second mask 108 are adjacent to each other and in the same plane (coplanar).

Each wafer fixture 112 and 116 in the mask stage 100 has a set of independent alignment controls. The first fixture 112 may have an 'x' lateral control 124 and a 'y' lateral control 120, or both. Similarly, the second fixture 116 may have an 'x' lateral control 132 and a 'y' lateral control 128, or both. In addition, the first fixture 112 and the second fixture 116 may have angular controls 126 and 134 to adjust the angle of placement (θ) of each mask. The alignment controls are used to carefully align the mask alignment marks 144 and 148 on the masks 104 and 108 with the wafer alignment marks. These alignment controls may comprise mechanical actuators or electromechanical actuators. Once aligned, the mask stage 100 maintains alignment.

Referring now to Fig. 6, the mask stage 100 is shown in a second scanning configuration. In this configuration, the mask stage 100 is configured such that the fixed relative position between the first mask 104 and the second mask 108 is perpendicular with the scanning direction. Again, the first mask 104 and the second mask 108 are adjacent to each other and in the same plane (coplanar).

Referring now to Fig. 7, an optional feature of the present invention is illustrated. A microscope viewer 216 provides a complimentary alignment and viewing means for the operator. The operator uses the microscope view 216 to register the alignment marks 208 and 212 on the masks 200 and 204 with complimentary alignment marks on the microscope objectives. This enables an off-axis alignment mechanism for the operator.

The two-mask stage of the present invention may be extended to a multiple mask stage by adding an additional mask fixture and alignment system. In this case, the first mask, second mask, and additional mask would be held in a fixed relative position after alignment to facilitate a sequential exposure of a wafer using each mask.

Referring now to Fig. 8, a first preferred embodiment of a method to pattern a photoresist layer in the manufacture of an integrated circuit device is shown. This method uses the novel two-mask stage of the apparatus of the present invention to improve the double-exposure scenario outlined in Figs. 1 through 3. First, a photoresist layer is deposited overlying a semiconductor substrate in step 500. The first mask and the second mask

are loaded into the novel two-mask stage in step 504. Note that, in this first embodiment of the double-exposure method, either the consistent (Fig. 5) or the perpendicular (Fig. 6) mask configuration may be used. The first mask and the second mask are aligned in step 508.

The first mask scan is now performed. First, the wafer is indexed to the starting field to set the current field location in step 512. Referring to Fig. 9, the starting field 406 is the uppermost, left-side field of the wafer. Referring again to Fig. 8, the first mask is scanned to expose the current field in step 516. The wafer is then stepped to the next field unexposed by the first mask to set a new current field in step 520. The scanning (step 516) and stepping (step 520) are repeated until all the fields on the wafer are exposed.

Referring once again to Fig. 9, a top view of the semiconductor wafer 400 is shown at the end of step 520. Every field 404 in the wafer has been exposed through the first mask at this point in the method.

Referring once again to Fig. 8, the second mask scan is now performed. The wafer is returned to the starting

field 406 (in Fig. 9) to set the current field in step 524. The second mask is scanned to expose the current field in step 528. The wafer is then stepped to the next field unexposed by the second mask to set a new current field in step 532. The scanning (step 528) and stepping (step 532) are repeated until all the fields on the wafer are exposed.

Referring now to Fig. 10, the semiconductor wafer 400 is shown at the end of step 532. Every field 404 has now been exposed through the second mask. Now, the pattern of the first mask and the second mask is superimposed on every field 404 of the wafer 400.

Referring once again to Fig. 8, the photoresist layer is developed to complete the method of patterning in step 536.

Referring now to Fig. 11, a second preferred embodiment of a method to pattern a photoresist layer in the manufacture of an integrated circuit device is shown. This method again uses the novel two-mask stage of the apparatus of the present invention to improve the double-exposure scenario outlined in Figs. 1 through 3. First, a photoresist layer is deposited overlying a semiconductor

substrate in step 600. The first mask and the second mask are loaded into the novel two-mask stage in step 604. Note that, in this second embodiment of the double-exposure method, only the consistent (Fig. 5) mask configuration may be used. The first mask and the second mask are aligned in step 608.

The wafer is indexed to the starting field to set the current field in step 612. Referring to Fig. 12, the starting field 306 is the uppermost, left-side field of the wafer. Referring again to Fig. 11, the first mask is scanned to expose the current field in step 616. Next, the second mask is scanned to expose the adjacent field in step 620. Note that it is not necessary to step the mask stage to do this exposure since the second mask is held adjacent to the first mask and is already positioned to expose the field adjacent to the field exposed through the first mask. The wafer is now stepped to the next field unexposed by the first mask to set a new current field in step 624. The scanning (step 616 and step 620) and stepping (step 624) are repeated until all the fields on the wafer are exposed.

Referring once again to Fig. 12, a top view of the semiconductor wafer 300 is shown at the end of step 624.

Every field on the wafer has been exposed through either the first mask 304 or the second mask 308 during this first pass scan.

Referring once again to Fig. 11, the second pass scan is now performed. The wafer is returned to the starting field 306 (in Fig. 12) to set the current field in step 628. The wafer is stepped to the next field unexposed by the second mask to set a new current field. Referring now to Fig. 13, the next field unexposed by the second mask 309 is shown. The second mask is scanned to expose the current field in step 636. The wafer is then stepped to the next field unexposed by the first mask to set a new current field in step 640. The first mask is now scanned to expose the current field in step 644. The scanning (step 636 and step 644) and stepping (step 640) are repeated until all the fields on the wafer are exposed.

Referring again to Fig. 13, the semiconductor wafer 300 is shown at the end of step 644. Now, the pattern of the first mask and the second mask is superimposed on every field 304 and 308 of the wafer 300. Note that only single mask scans are required at the beginning and ending fields

312 of each row. These single mask exposure fields are called fill-in fields 312.

Referring now to Fig. 14, the fill-in fields may be completed using a partial scan wherein the stepper is programmed to single expose the beginning and ending fields 312 with the missing mask.

Referring once again to Fig. 11, the photoresist layer is developed to complete the method of patterning in step 648.

The optical lithographic exposure apparatus described provides a significant advantage over the prior art. The novel two-mask stage enables a double-exposure process without a time consuming mask change and alignment. This facilitates the use of alternating phase shifting mask (PSM) technology to produce very fine line width features in an integrated circuit manufacturing process. The methods of patterning a photoresist layer using the two-mask stage provide a very manufacturable approach to phase shifting mask lithography.

[illegible]

1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043	2044	2045	2046	2047	2048	2049	2050	2051	2052	2053	2054	2055	2056	2057	2058	2059	2060	2061	2062	2063	2064	2065	2066	2067	2068	2069	2070	2071	2072	2073	2074	2075	2076	2077	2078	2079	2080	2081	2082	2083	2084	2085	2086	2087	2088	2089	2090	2091	2092	2093	2094	2095	2096	2097	2098	2099	2100	2101	2102	2103	2104	2105	2106	2107	2108	2109	2110	2111	2112	2113	2114	2115	2116	2117	2118	2119	2120	2121	2122	2123	2124	2125	2126	2127	2128	2129	2130	2131	2132	2133	2134	2135	2136	2137	2138	2139	2140	2141	2142	2143	2144	2145	2146	2147	2148	2149	2150	2151	2152	2153	2154	2155	2156	2157	2158	2159	2160	2161	2162	2163	2164	2165	2166	2167	2168	2169	2170	2171	2172	2173	2174	2175	2176	2177	2178	2179	2180	2181	2182	2183	2184	2185	2186	2187	2188	2189	2190	2191	2192	2193	2194	2195	2196	2197	2198	2199	2200	2201	2202	2203	2204	2205	2206	2207	2208	2209	2210	2211	2212	2213	2214	2215	2216	2217	2218	2219	2220	2221	2222	2223	2224	2225	2226	2227	2228	2229	2230	2231	2232	2233	2234	2235	2236	2237	2238	2239	2240	2241	2242	2243	2244	2245	2246	2247	2248	2249	2250	2251	2252	2253	2254	2255	2256	2257	2258	2259	2260	2261	2262	2263	2264	2265	2266	2267	2268	2269	2270	2271	2272	2273	2274	2275	2276	2277	2278	2279	2280	2281	2282	2283	2284	2285	2286	2287	2288	2289	2290	2291	2292	2293	2294	2295	2296	2297	2298	2299	2300	2301	2302	2303	2304	2305	2306	2307	2308	2309	2310	2311	2312	2313	2314	2315	2316	2317	2318	2319	2320	2321	2322	2323	2324	2325	2326	2327	2328	2329	2330	2331	2332	2333	2334	2335	2336	2337	2338	2339	2340	2341	2342	2343	2344	2345	2346	2347	2348	2349	2350	2351	2352	2353	2354	2355	2356	2357	2358	2359	2360	2361	2362	2363	2364	2365	2366	2367	2368	2369	2370	2371	2372	2373	2374	2375	2376	2377	2378	2379	2380	2381	2382	2383	2384	2385</
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